

# Forestry Statistics 2020

## Chapter 6: Social

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## Introduction

This chapter contains statistics on:

- the number and profile of visits to all woodlands from household surveys; and
- the number and profile of visits to Forestry England/ Forestry and Land Scotland/ Natural Resources Wales/ Forest Service woodlands from on-site surveys and administrative sources.

The statistics in this chapter need to be viewed in the context of broader changes in the UK population, with an increasing and ageing population.

More recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has led to an increase in visits to the outdoors. Initial studies are providing some information on these changes, but these have not been incorporated into this release yet. For further information, see:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/people-and-nature-survey-for-england> (see monthly interim indicators);
- <https://gov.wales/national-survey-wales-monthly-survey-july-2020>
- <https://www.nature.scot/outdoor-visits-and-engagement-nature-during-coronavirus-lockdown> and
- <http://www.outdoorrecreationni.com/news/new-survey-highlights-importance-of-accessing-outdoors-safely-during-covid-19/>.

Geographical coverage for social statistics varies. Estimates are presented at country level and, where possible, UK or GB totals are included. Further information on the data sources and methodology used to compile the figures is provided in the Sources chapter.

Most of the statistics presented in this chapter have been previously released by other organisations. The latest year figures for day visitors to Forest Service sites in Northern Ireland are published for the first time in this release. Figures for earlier years have not been revised from those previously published. For further details on revisions, see the Social section of the Sources chapter.

The frequency with which the estimates in this chapter are updated varies depending on the data sources used. Whilst some of the information presented is now several years old, it represents the latest available data and has been included to provide a more rounded picture of the social use of forests in the UK.

Further information on the advantages and disadvantages of household surveys and of on-site surveys is provided in the Social section of the Sources chapter.

A copy of all social tables can be accessed in spreadsheet format from the Data Downloads web page at [www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/data-downloads/](http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/data-downloads/).

### Key findings

The main findings are:

- There were an estimated 368 million visits to woodlands in England in 2018-19.
- Around one half (49%) of visits to woodlands in England in 2018-19 were within 2 miles.
- “Health and exercise” and “fresh air or to enjoy pleasant weather” were important reasons for visits to woodlands in England and Wales.
- Walking was the most common activity on visits to woodland in England.
- Around 465 thousand people visited Forest Service sites where a charge is made in Northern Ireland in 2019-20.

### 6.1 Visits to woodland - household surveys

The information shown below in Table 6.1 has been obtained from the following general population household surveys.

- Scottish Recreation Survey (2009 to 2012)
- Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey (2011, 2014)
- Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (England, 2009-10 onwards)
- Scotland's People and Nature Survey (2013, 2017/18)

It is likely that differences in survey design and methodology have contributed to a considerable proportion of the differences in results between these surveys. The figures in Table 6.1 should not be interpreted as time trends but instead as separate results from each survey. Further information on the differences between surveys is provided in the Recreation section of the Sources chapter.

In common with all sample based surveys, the results from each survey are subject to the effects of chance, depending on the particular survey method used and the sample achieved, thus confidence limits apply to all results from these surveys.

Results from the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment 2018-19 estimate a total of 368 million visits to woodlands in England (Table 6.1). This is a statistically significant decrease from the 2017-18 figure of 437 million visits.

The Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey 2014 estimated a total of 68 million visits to woodlands by Welsh residents. This is a statistically significant decrease from the estimated total of 86 million in 2011, but similar to the 2008 estimate (64 million).

Scotland's People and Nature Survey 2017/18 reports an estimated total of 117 million visits to woodlands in Scotland. This is a statistically significant increase from the 2013 estimate of 90 million visits.

**Table 6.1 Number of visits to woodland by journey starting point**  
million visits

<b>Year</b>	<b>England</b>	<b>Wales</b>	<b>Scotland</b>
2009	317	..	57
2010	326	..	63
2011	358	86	65
2012	357	..	62
2013	378	..	90
2014	417	68	..
2015	446	..	..
2016	439	..	..
2017	437	..	117
2018	368	..	..

Sources:

England 2009 on: Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE), carried out by TNS;

Wales 2011, 2014: Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey carried out by TNS;

Scotland 2009 - 2012: Scottish Recreation Survey (ScRS), carried out by TNS;

Scotland 2013, 2017: Scotland's People and Nature Survey (SPANs), carried out by TNS.

Notes:

1. MENE covered trips taken in England, including those from holiday bases, by respondents living in England. Results relate to 12 month periods from March to February.
2. The Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey totals shown are for trips with woodland as the main destination.
3. The Scottish Recreation Survey ran from July 2003 until December 2012. It was replaced by Scotland's People and Nature Survey that ran from March 2013 to February 2014 and from May 2017 to April 2018. Both surveys covered visits to the outdoors for leisure and recreation in Scotland by people living in Scotland. The total shown is for all trips that included a visit to woodland.
4. In each survey, visits to overseas destinations are excluded.
5. .. Denotes data not available.

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.

## 6.1.1 England

### Household surveys in England

In March 2009 fieldwork commenced on the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey, which includes collecting information on visits to the outdoors in England. Further information on the survey, including copies of annual reports and online data viewers to access more detailed results, is available at [www.gov.uk/government/collections/monitor-of-engagement-with-the-natural-environment-survey-purpose-and-results](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/monitor-of-engagement-with-the-natural-environment-survey-purpose-and-results).

Tables 6.2a to 6.2e shows the main characteristics of visits to woodlands over the most recent 5 years.

In 2018-19, walking was the main mode of transport for almost one half (47%) of visits to woodland.

**Table 6.2a Mode of transport to visit woodlands - England 2014-15 to 2018-19**

per cent of respondents

<b>Main mode of transport</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>
On foot	60	60	54	53	47
Car / van	36	36	42	44	45
Bicycle	2	2	2	1	1

Source: Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE), Natural England.

Notes:

1. All trips that included a visit to woodland.

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.

Around one half (49%) of visits to woodland were within 2 miles.

Table 6.2b Distance travelled to visit woodlands - England 2014-15 to 2018-19

per cent of respondents

<b>Distance travelled (one way)</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>
Less than 1 mile	39	32	28	29	25
1 to 2 miles	25	31	28	27	24
3 to 5 miles	19	20	21	23	26
6 to 10 miles	9	8	11	11	10
Over 10 miles	9	10	12	10	16

Source: Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE), Natural England.

Notes:

1. All trips that included a visit to woodland.

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.



Health or exercise was the most popular reason for visiting woodlands in England in 2018-19 (70%).

**Table 6.2c Motivation for visits to woodlands - England 2014-15 to 2018-19**

per cent of respondents

<b>Motivation for visit</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>
For health or exercise	53	60	55	56	70
To exercise your dog	66	65	60	53	53
For fresh air or to enjoy pleasant weather	39	41	39	41	46
To relax and unwind	35	42	37	37	40
To enjoy scenery	32	38	34	36	34
To be somewhere you like	23	26	25	26	29
For peace and quiet	22	27	33	26	29
To enjoy wildlife	27	30	28	28	28
To spend time with family	17	14	15	16	28

Source: Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE), Natural England.

Notes:

1. All trips that included a visit to woodland.
2. Excludes other reasons for visiting, each reported by fewer than 20% of respondents in 2018-19.
3. Respondents were able to select more than one option, so results do not sum to 100%.

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.

Walking (with or without a dog) was the most popular activity on visits to woodland in England in 2018-19.

**Table 6.2d Activities on visits to woodlands - England 2014-15 to 2018-19**

per cent of respondents

<b>Activities during visit</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>
Walking without a dog	22	23	31	56	56
Walking with a dog	68	66	59	36	36
Playing with children	6	6	8	10	15
Eating or Drinking Out	5	6	8	10	15
Cycling/ mountain biking	4	3	6	4	6

Source: Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE), Natural England.

Notes:

1. All trips that included a visit to woodland.
2. Excludes other activities, each reported by fewer than 5% of respondents in 2018-19.
3. Respondents were able to select more than one option, so results do not sum to 100%.

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.

Most visits to woodlands in England (62%) lasted up to 2 hours in 2018-19.

**Table 6.2e Duration of visits to woodlands - England 2014-15 to 2018-19**

per cent of respondents

<b>Duration of visit</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>
Up to 1 hour	51	50	43	45	39
1+ to 2 hours	28	29	29	26	23
2+ to 3 hours	8	9	11	12	18
Over 3 hours	5	4	9	7	11

Source: Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE), Natural England.

Notes:

1. All trips that included a visit to woodland.

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.

## 6.1.2 Wales

### Household surveys in Wales

The National Survey for Wales began in March 2016 and replaced a number of separate surveys of households in Wales, including the Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey (WORS). The survey is completed by around 12,000 people each year and covers a wide range of topics. Further information on the survey, including copies of reports and data, is available at <https://gov.wales/national-survey-wales>.

Table 6.3 shows the reasons provided for their visit to the outdoors by respondents who stated that the main destination of the visit was woodland. "Health and exercise" and "fresh air or to enjoy pleasant weather" were the most important reasons reported for visits to woodlands in Wales.

**Table 6.3 Reasons for visit to woodland or forest – Wales**

per cent of respondents

<b>Reason for visit</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2018-19</b>
For health or exercise	47	55
For fresh air or to enjoy pleasant weather	50	47
For pleasure / enjoyment	42	42
To spend time with family	39	41
To relax and unwind	34	41
To enjoy scenery and wildlife	38	39
To exercise the dog	38	30
For peace and quiet	22	29
To spend time with friends	16	22

Source: National Survey for Wales (Welsh Government).

Notes:

1. Visits where the main destination was woodland.
2. Respondents were able to select more than one option, so results do not sum to 100%.
3. Excludes other reasons for visiting, each reported by fewer than 20% of respondents in 2018-19.

### 6.1.3 Public Opinion of Forestry Survey - Woodland visitors

The Public Opinion of Forestry Survey is carried out every two years and obtains people's attitudes to forestry and forestry-related issues, including visits to woodland. Copies of reports and detailed data tables are available at [www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/statistics-by-topic/public-opinion-of-forestry/](http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/statistics-by-topic/public-opinion-of-forestry/).

The results shown in Tables 6.4 and 6.5 and Figure 6.1 have been taken from the UK and country reports on the latest surveys in 2019 and from surveys in earlier years. The reports also include other recreation-related results, such as whether the woodlands visited were in towns or the countryside and any reasons given by survey respondents for not visiting woodlands.

In the UK 2019 survey, over three fifths (63%) of respondents said that they had visited woodland in the last few years for walks, picnics or other recreation (Table 6.4).

Table 6.4 Woodland visitors<sup>1</sup>

per cent of respondents

Year	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	UK
2003	66	62	64	77	67
2005	65	69	50	67	65
2007	76	79	75	62	77
2009	77	..	57	..	77
2010	..	..	..	72	..
2011	68	68	75	..	67
2013	65	64	76	..	66
2014	..	..	..	75	..
2015	55	64	78	..	56
2017	62	72	84	..	61
2019	63	77	..	78	63

Source: UK/GB, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland Public Opinion of Forestry Surveys

Base: UK/GB = 4,000 respondents (2003 to 2007), 2,000 respondents (2009 to 2019);

Scotland and Wales = 1,000 respondents each;

Northern Ireland = 120 respondents (2003), 1,000 respondents (all other years).

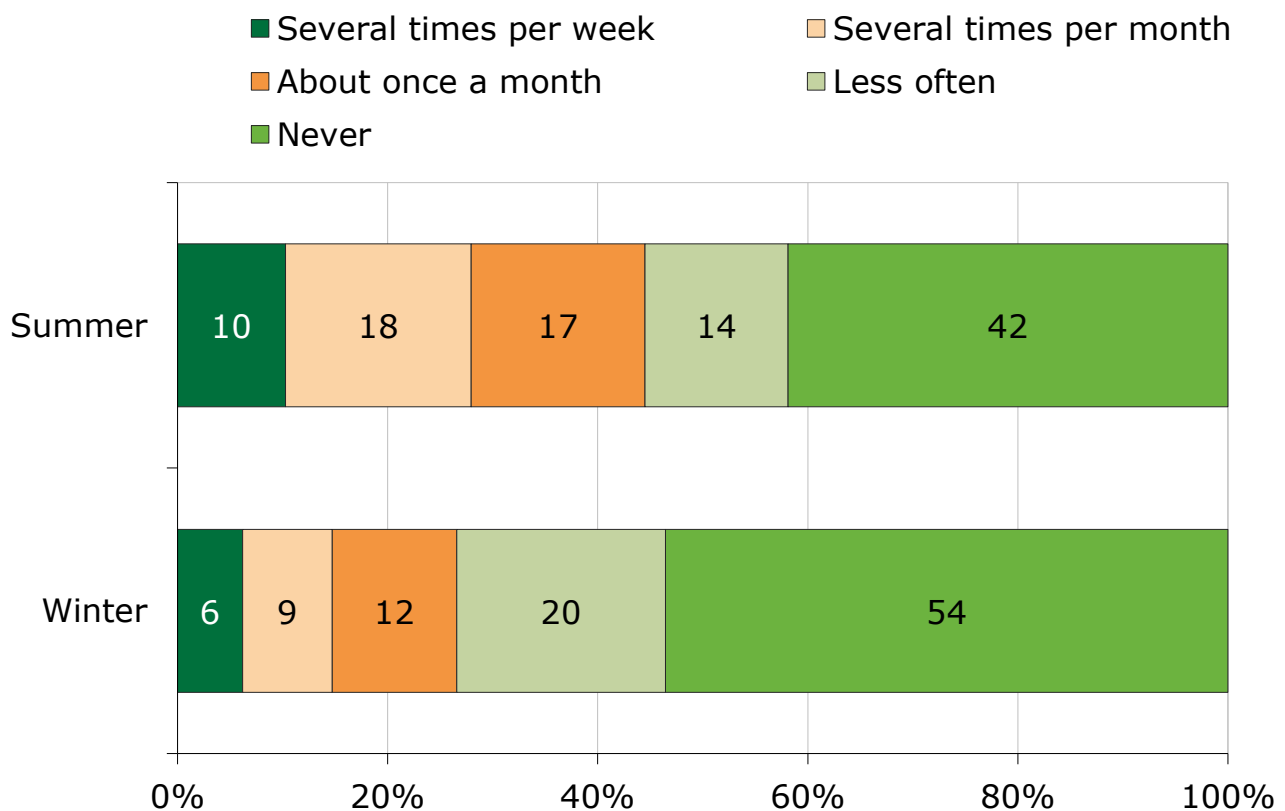
Notes:

1. Those stating that they had visited woodland in the last few years.
2. The range of uncertainty around any result should be no more than  $\pm 3.5\%$  (for surveys with around 2,000 respondents) and  $\pm 4.7\%$  (for surveys with around 1,000 respondents). To compare results over time, a difference of at least 5 percentage points (for surveys each with around 2,000 respondents) and at least 7 percentage points (for surveys each with around 1,000 respondents) is required to indicate that there is a significant difference.
3. .. Denotes data not available (survey not run that year or question not asked).

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.

Survey respondents were asked how frequently they had visited during the previous summer and winter. Figure 6.1, which presents aggregated UK results for the 2015 to 2019 surveys, shows that respondents visited much more often during the summer, with 44% of respondents visiting at least once a month in the summer compared to around one quarter (27%) in the winter.

Figure 6.1 Frequency of visits to woodlands



Source: UK Public Opinion of Forestry Surveys, 2015 to 2019.

Base: Average visit frequencies from last three UK surveys: 2,000 respondents per survey.

Notes:

1. The range of uncertainty around any result should be no more than  $\pm 3.5\%$  in any individual year and no more than  $\pm 1.1\%$  for the 3 surveys combined.

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.

### 6.1.4 Public Opinion of Forestry Survey - woodland visitors by age group

In the UK 2019 Public Opinion of Forestry survey, 71% of respondents aged 35 to 54 said that they had visited woodland in the last few years for walks, picnics or other recreation (Table 6.5). This compares with around three fifths (61%) of respondents aged 16 to 34 and 56% of those aged 55 or over.

Table 6.5 Woodland visitors<sup>1</sup> by age group

per cent of respondents

Year	Aged 16 to 34	Aged 35 to 54	Aged 55 and over	Total
1999	73	74	55	67
2001	75	77	63	72
2003	71	72	60	67
2005	66	74	56	65
2007	79	82	69	77
2009	78	84	69	77
2011	65	74	63	67
2013	62	75	60	66
2015	54	62	53	56
2017	60	68	55	61
2019	61	71	56	63

Source: UK and GB Public Opinion of Forestry Surveys, 1999 to 2019.

Base: 2,000 respondents (1999, 2001, 2009 to 2019); 4,000 respondents (2003 to 2007).

Notes:

1. Those stating they had visited woodland in the last few years.
2. The range of uncertainty around any result should be no more than  $\pm 3.5\%$  (for surveys with around 2,000 respondents) and  $\pm 2.3\%$  (for surveys with around 4,000 respondents). To compare results over time, a difference of at least 5 percentage points (for surveys each with around 2,000 respondents) is required to indicate that there is a significant difference.

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.



### 6.2 Visits to woodland - on-site surveys

The previous section provided information on visits to all woodlands (regardless of ownership), based on data from household surveys. This section provides information on visits to Forestry England/ Forestry and Land Scotland/ Natural Resources Wales/ Forest Service woodland only, based on data from on-site surveys and administrative sources.

The information provided in this section covers:

- Visits to the National Forest Estate in Scotland (Forestry and Land Scotland woodlands) from the All Forests Scotland surveys run from 2004 to 2007 and in 2012-13. An updated estimate of total visits in 2016 is also provided.
- Day visitors to Northern Ireland Forest Service sites where an admission charge was made.

### 6.2.1 Scotland All Forests Survey

All Forests surveying in Scotland has been undertaken on two occasions. The first All Forests Survey in Scotland was carried out across a three-year period from June 2004 to June 2007, and estimated that around 8.2 million visits are made annually to Forestry and Land Scotland woodland. An estimated 150-200 thousand visits to events in forests and around 300 thousand visits during the hours of darkness (when fieldwork was not undertaken) were also made, giving an overall total of around 8.7 million visits per year.

The second All Forests Survey was carried out from November 2012 to October 2013, and estimated an annual total of 9.1 million visits (including visits to events and in the hours of darkness) to Forestry and Land Scotland woodland. This represents a 5% increase on the estimated overall total of 8.7 million visits from the 2004-2007 survey.

The estimated number of visits has been updated using data from 224 automatic counters at 165 sites. For sites without counters, estimates have been produced using the results from the 2012-13 All Forests Survey and advice from local managers. This gives an overall estimate of 10.2 million visits to Forestry and Land Scotland woodland in 2016, a 12% increase from 2012-13.

Further information is available on the Forestry and Land Scotland website at <https://forestryandland.gov.scot/what-we-do/tourism-and-recreation/research-resources-guidance>.

### 6.2.2 Northern Ireland Forest Service day visitors

Information on visitors to Forest Service sites in Northern Ireland is provided by the Forest Service and relates only to sites where an admission charge is made.

In Northern Ireland in 2019-20, 465 thousand people visited those Forest Service sites where an admission charge was made (Table 6.6). This represented a 13% decrease from the previous year, and is reflective of new partnership agreements with local councils for the management of recreation facilities in Forest Service forests coming into effect.

**Table 6.6 Day visitors to Northern Ireland Forest Service sites<sup>1</sup>**  
thousands

<b>Year</b>	<b>Visitors to Forest Service sites</b>
2010-11	468
2011-12	430
2012-13	340
2013-14	364
2014-15	397
2015-16	432
2016-17	584
2017-18	509
2018-19	532
2019-20	465

Source: Forest Service

Notes:

1. Number of people visiting sites where an admission charge was made, excluding campers.

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.